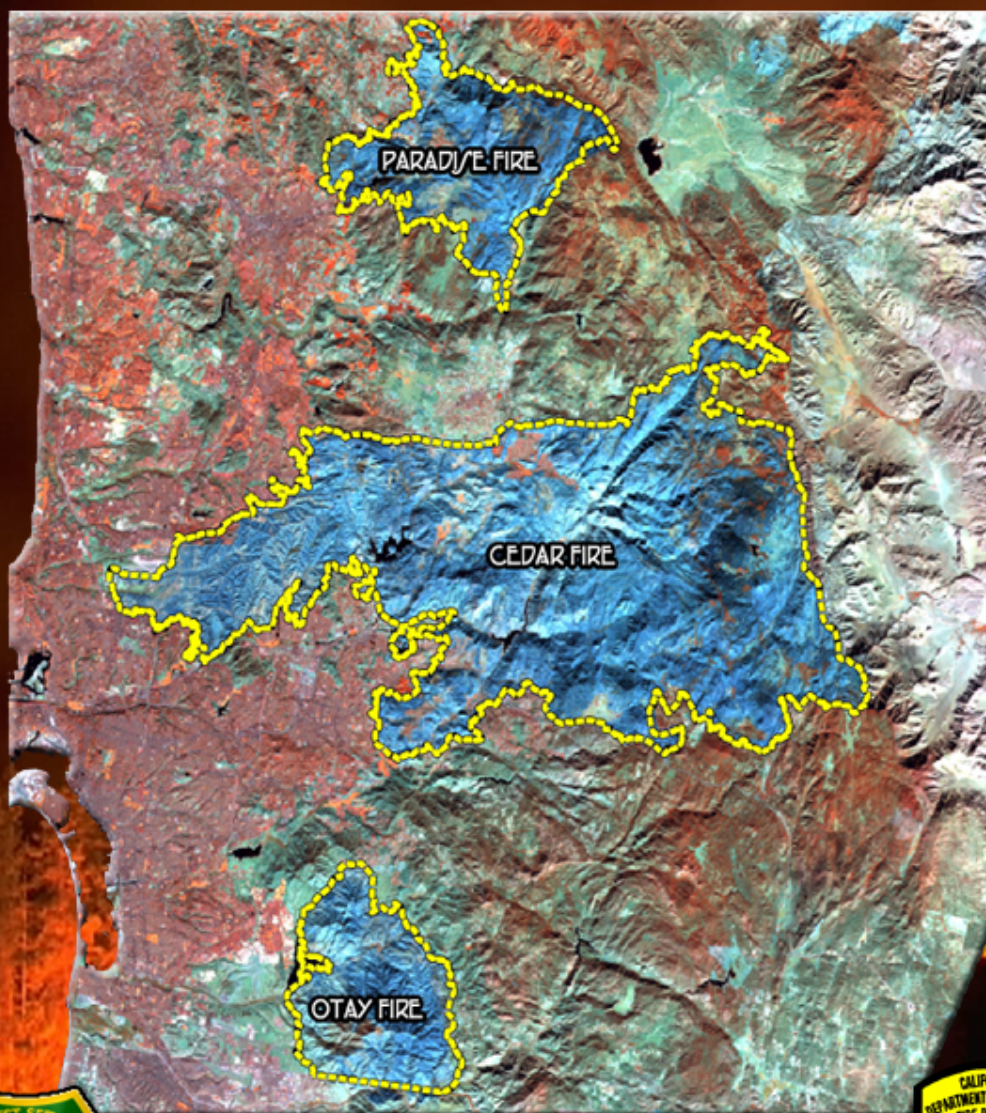


## Appendix A: Interagency Workshops

# THE 2003 SAN DIEGO COUNTY FIRE SIEGE FIRE SAFETY REVIEW



**Background:** The 2003 San Diego County Fires Stakeholder Workshop was held on November 20, 2003 in Carlsbad, California. The goal of the workshop was to provide a forum for discussion and interchange of ideas and perceptions about the Cedar, Paradise and Otay fires. Specifically, participants' input was sought on topics including operations, interagency coordination, incident safety, training, readiness, and other areas of concern.

Participants included local, county, state and federal administrative, fire service and law enforcement personnel, representatives from the U.S. military, CALTRANS, California Office of Emergency Services.

**Workshop Format:** After an introductory session, participants joined small, diverse discussion groups of 5-7 to share observations in the following categories. There were approximately six groups in total.

- **Interagency Coordination**
- **Operations**
- **Safety**
- **Media Coordination and Relations**
- **Pre-suppression / Planning**
- **Public Relations**
- **Post-Fire Activities**

The groups first discussed “what went well” within the categories, and then “what needs improvement”

## **What Went Well**

### **Interagency Coordination**

Overwhelmingly, participants expressed that interagency cooperation and relationships were good on the fires. These relationships had been established before the fires, and these positive alliances were viewed as critical to effective incident management. Participants expressed that initial attack cooperation on the ground was very good. Pre-fire interagency training that was conducted in the northern zone of San Diego County was valuable in improving preparedness. Unified initial attack operations were successful, as were independent actions taking place on a smaller. Independent actions occurred on a smaller, more localized scale, and were characterized as “prudent and effective”

Groups generally agreed the mutual aid system worked well, in the way it was designed, even though resources were scarce. Local departments generously donated resources despite critical drawdown concerns. Good communications facilitated success in this area. Daily cooperator meetings were viewed as very effective and regular Zone coordination conference calls were viewed as extremely helpful.

Law Enforcement agencies provided great cooperation and valuable assistance. This included the County court system, CHP, SDSO, local Police, and the US Border Patrol. On the Cedar Fire, interaction between law enforcement and fire was “seamless” at the division/group level, specifically between Lakeside FD and CHP. The CHP’s participation and real-time decision making capability was critical and very successful. The San Diego County Sheriff co-located their ICP with the Operations Section Chief on Paradise Fire, and this close working relationship streamlined the decision making process.

Non-fire resources such as the Red Cross, Animal Control, and volunteers were helpful, effective and generally well-coordinated. The Transportation Management Center coordinated and dispatched resources effectively. Dispatch of CALTRANS resources went smoothly.

Coordination for military deployment and training went well.

## **Operations**

Initiative, resourcefulness and independent actions were necessary and effective when resources had no time to work within overhead process during initial attack. Initiative by Division Supervisors was critical to operations and divisions and groups did excellent work with few resources and small work groups. The willingness of crews to work long shifts with no relief and the recall of off-duty personnel were critical to initial attack efforts

Early unified command assembly mitigated many problems within the Cedar incident. The two zone IC’s for the Cedar Fire met twice a day. An all-inclusive decision making process fostered a team approach. Unified command and ICS functioned well. Rapid demobilization from the Roblar 2 fire to the Paradise/Cedar (north zone) helped control efforts, as did pre-staging of Incident Management Teams in area. Line overhead and resources were effective in limiting life and property losses with limited resources (34,000 homes saved). Incident planning proceeded efficiently on the Cedar fire, and plans were issued by OP#2.

Holding actions at Pine Hills, Julian were extremely effective even with relatively few resources to do the job. In addition, CDF’s work at holding fire at Hwy 67 was excellent. Successes were seen in Viejas to Mt. Laguna, and along the 805 freeway. No water problems were experienced in interface zone areas.

Evacuations went exceedingly well in a number of areas including Mt Palomar, Escondido City, LaJolla Reservation, San Diego City Paradise. Animal evacuation was well-organized, considering the circumstances, and was safely conducted. Line and overhead resources, small in number relative to incident size and complexity, prevented the loss of over 34,000 homes.

## **Safety**

Groups recognized that aside from fatalities, overall the safety record for the three fires was very good, especially considering conditions on the fire. Injuries were minimal and no aviation accidents occurred. Cooperating non-fire agencies stayed safe. Weather forecasting was accurate.

## **Media**

Stakeholders acknowledged the media and press as an excellent source of information for the community. The media worked well with information early in the incident. The TMC – Media coordination center functioned efficiently. Caltrans intelligence / coordination went well.

Joint County –wide press conferences “unified process”.

## **Pre-suppression / Planning**

Several emergency responders had participated in recent nuclear disaster drills hosted by San Diego County and found the training to be very helpful. Pre-incident prescribed fire work was critical to holding operation in some areas, and some pre-fire burns and fuel management activities prevented losses.

## **Public Relations**

The level of public support was high, and their assistance to emergency responders was significant. They assisted with logistics, evacuation, provided meals and other assistance, and generally exhibited a high degree of cooperation.

## **Post-Fire**

Damage assessment – structure, agricultural losses, and saves of structures.

## **Improvements Needed**

### **Interagency Coordination**

Groups expressed the need for long-term contingency planning for large incidents within San Diego County. These plans would include agreements with outside fire assisting agencies and departments, such as cooperators from Arizona; and agreements for backfilling and automatic aid for cities. Drawdown levels were critical during the 2003 fire siege. The mutual aid system was overloaded.

Preparedness was a key issue. County-wide workshops and drills and WUI operations training programs are needed that would include participants from all fire departments, law enforcement agencies, and all other assisting agencies. Groups expressed training should be available at all levels to all agencies, to include command and field exercises, classes, SEMS and ICS. An all-department, all risk Unified Command should be mobilized. Participants feel it is crucial to continue to foster pre season meetings and training and to encourage

participation by all public safety agencies. Interrelationships should be a priority, and regular meetings help build on these partnerships.

Preparedness meetings and training should also include the Emergency Operations Center (EOC), Geographic Area Coordination Centers (GACC), and the Emergency Communications Centers (ECC). Time should be taken to further develop and review roles and responsibilities and contacts between GACC, EOC, ECC, etc. Fire agencies need strong involvement with the County EOC during incidents and should designate a representative(s).

Groups expressed it was important to further develop coordination between law enforcement, the fire services and the military. Accessibility to military resources needs to be streamlined, and fire agencies need to be educated about the capability and accessibility of military resources, and the processes necessary to train, certify and use them.

### **Communications**

Interoperability of communications systems and other technical and logistical difficulties was the primary theme among groups when discussing communications. Communication systems had numerous compatibility problems because some responders had 800 MHz systems, others used VHF. Air to ground communications was impaired. Dead spots and interference from non-fire frequency users were a problem. There were an insufficient number of radios for ground resources. The use of different frequencies, the lack of a sufficient number of command and dedicated frequencies and repeaters also was a recurring theme among groups.

Groups cited a need for a regionally standard system (black box technology) and global programming capability. Frequencies compatible with local capabilities should be pre-identified. A San Diego County radio cache should be established for radios and related equipment, and PPE.

### **Incident Management / Resources**

There was concern that local resources were not adequately trained for incidents of the magnitude that occurred. Groups see the need to develop adequately trained and qualified personnel for incident assignments. All agencies need familiarization all aspects of ICS as a tool and its flexibility to fit the situation at hand.

Overwhelmingly participants said there just weren't enough firefighting resources available. Interstate/ intrastate move up and mutual aid agreements should be pursued. Ordering of resources and support assets needs to be streamlined, and local incident support capabilities need further development. The differences and lack of interface between MIRPS and ROSS seemed to exacerbate delays in resource ordering.

Participants expressed extensive statewide resource move up should commence earlier on, and additional interstate mutual aid options should be pursued. All areas of area drawdown need to be established and identified. Early pre-staging of critical resources such as Incident Management Teams should be continued. IMT's should come augmented to meet projected needs.

Demobilization operations were frustrating to group participants. Personnel demobilization back to local home units was disorganized and did not always address local drawdown concerns. Some noted unnecessary delays on other fires while waiting for reassignments.

Groups felt the availability of support resources was helpful, but their use needs to be fully maximized to free up firefighting resources. For example CALTRANS personnel could be used to implement road closures instead of firefighters.

### **Operations / Logistics/ Intel**

Workshop participants discussed logistics problems on the Paradise and Cedar fires. Food, water, fuel and other essential supplies were not available early on (October 26<sup>TH</sup> – 27<sup>TH</sup>). Ordering local services and goods and initiating local contracts was problematic. Ordering “non-traditional” resources (a Chaplain in one case) was difficult.

Groups voiced concerns that intelligence regarding fire behavior was scant or completely lacking. This caused problems with evacuation efforts in some instances. Existing technologies (satellite, gels, and global positioning systems communications) that could be potentially very useful to gather intelligence (and reduce personnel exposure to hazards) are not fully used.

Many workshop participants did not support the concept of Zoning fires and felt it was detrimental to the operations efficiency of the Cedar, one participant termed it as “catastrophic”.

On the Cedar fire, communication between IC and Branch Directors was initially sporadic.

### **Aviation/ Aviation Safety**

Participants discussed the lack of local jurisdiction air support and the general shortage of air resources in San Diego County. Participants discussed the inadequate levels of air and ground support early on in the incidents (26<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup>)

Cumbersome regulations to initiate the use of military aircraft caused frustration. A review of the Economy Act review is recommended to streamline the process. A helicopter coordinator should be provided to work with all military helicopters. A coordination process to synchronize activities of multiple incidents or agencies should be implemented.

There were problems with air to ground coordination and communications during the Cedar fire.

Participants expressed concern regarding the controversy over aircraft use on the Cedar fire. The “Cutoff policy” needs review to ensure federal and state consistency. Public education programs that emphasize appropriate and safe suppression aircraft use and the use of military assets would help avoid controversy and misunderstandings in the media.

Participants want to utilize the best technologies to gather intelligence efficiently while minimizing personnel exposure, such as unmanned aircraft, satellite imagery, web cameras, downlinks, etc. They suggest the evaluation of media capabilities to provide intelligence and information gathering.

### **Pre-suppression / Planning**

Participants expressed concern over what they perceived as a lack of comprehensive planning in many important areas. Public safety preplanning needs include escape and evacuation routes, notification systems, and safety and survival zones. Evacuation policies need development and refinement. Fuels management plans for open space, interface, and park areas were widely discussed. Participants cited a lack of easily accessed or widely disseminated disaster plans or maps.

Many residents chose to “shelter in place”, remaining to protect their homes. While often these efforts were successful, workshop participants were concerned for the safety of residents. “Safe to stay” standards and training were suggested by many groups.

ICS certifications and qualifications for locals was a significant topic of conversation during the session. Training is needed for local departments, but funds are not always available. Local departments need additional WUI operations training.

A statewide, all-risk disaster training program was discussed. Elements of this training would include emergency response, EOC and ECC mobilization, and interagency coordination and operations.

Other training needs mentioned include a consistent structure triage strategy and flagging protocol, maps and plans for future evacuations Infrastructure and standards for roads and addressing, particularly in rural areas.

### **Media**

Participants were particularly sensitive about negative media reports that were not always based on facts. They characterized the reports as “inaccurate” and “irresponsible” and “Monday morning quarterbacking”. They indicated that joint press conferences were needed, because no unified response to negative media



was made during the incidents. Participants expressed the local media needs more education relative to wildland fire operations, and that more knowledge would help prevent these problems in the future. On the Cedar fire, it was perceived media coordination needed improvement under the incident command system.

The political environment surrounding the Cedar, Paradise and Otay fires was difficult and contentious.

### **Safety**

More training in wildland urban interface operations is needed for local departments. Participants urged support in the development of interagency training classes & exercises/simulations to meet this goal.

Safety was a big concern for participants. They expressed it was critical to Make PPE available to all responders. Some personnel did not have adequate PPE even though they worked in areas that were hazardous. Tracking systems are needed for personnel assigned to incidents, for both purposes of safety and most efficient use of resources. A policy or process is needed to develop “bird dogs” or local guides for non-local resources.

Resources should be assigned to tasks that are suited to their skills and resources. Some felt resources were sometimes assigned to duties that were inappropriate for their level of training and experience.

### **Other**

Participants expressed that environmental planning and compliance issues diminished the extent and efficacy of fuels treatments.

## **Recommendations**

### **Communications**

Groups cited a need for a regionally standard system (black box technology) and global programming capability. Frequencies compatible with local capabilities should be pre-identified. A San Diego County radio cache should be established for radios and related equipment, and PPE. A system is needed to disseminate information to all EOC's

### **Preparedness**

A statewide, all-risk disaster training program was discussed. Elements of this training would include emergency response, EOC and ECC mobilization, and interagency coordination and operations, and media coordination.



More training in wildland urban interface operations is needed for local departments on a statewide basis. Training would also include command, field exercises, simulations and classes, and training on SEMS and ICS. Participants urged support in the development of interagency training classes & exercises/simulations to meet this goal. Law enforcement and all public cooperating agencies should participate in this training.

A predictive services program should be established to better forecast upcoming hazardous conditions and provide good assessments of potential fire behavior and extent. This program could also provide real-time, easy to access information on current conditions during and incident.

#### Community Protection

Large scale, cross-jurisdictional, coordinated fuels management planning and work is needed in undeveloped open space areas. WUI fuels management is essential, and enforcement of consistent hazard abatement and vegetation clearance codes is needed. Enforcement and application of clearance and building codes is inconsistent throughout the county. Existing structures need to be retrofitted with new products, such as fire resistant siding and roofs. Rural water issues were a concern to many, with many residences had no power and could not pump from tanks and wells. More restrictive, more consistent building codes should be in place for WUI areas. Public education efforts need to be enhanced.

Vegetation “buffers” or zones of thinned or removed vegetation in undeveloped areas near homes are needed to reduce the threat of WUI incidents

Community-based fuels management projects are of significant help in the overall fuels management strategy in the WUI. Continue to foster these efforts, and assist with coordination

Public safety preplanning needs include escape and evacuation routes, notification systems, and safety and survival zones. Evacuation policies need development and refinement. All public safety organizations should take part in pre-incident planning and management activities. Plans need to be easily accessible and widely disseminated.

Consistent structure triage strategy and flagging protocol, maps and plans for future evacuations are needed. Infrastructure and standards for roads and addressing, is necessary particularly in rural areas.

#### Wildland Fire Resource Issues

All agencies need familiarization all aspects of ICS as a tool and its flexibility to fit the situation at hand.

Extensive statewide resource move up should commence earlier on, and additional interstate mutual aid options should be pursued.

Ordering of resources and support assets needs to be streamlined, and local incident support capabilities need further development.

All areas of area drawdown need to be established and identified. Early pre-staging of critical resources such as Incident Management Teams should be continued. IMT's should come augmented to meet projected needs.

Maximize the use of non-fire support resources to free up firefighting resources. For example CALTRANS personnel could be used to implement road closures instead of firefighters.

Military assets are a potentially important resource. A review of the Economy Act review is needed to streamline the process of utilizing these resources. Accessibility to military resources needs to be streamlined, and fire agencies need to be educated about the capability and accessibility of military resources, and the processes necessary to train, certify and use them.

#### Aviation Safety

Public and media education programs that emphasize appropriate and safe suppression aircraft use and the use of military assets would help avoid public controversy and misunderstandings.

Evaluate the media capabilities to gather intelligence. Work on cooperative relationships with media outlets

Participants want to utilize the best technologies to gather intelligence efficiently while minimizing personnel exposure, such as unmanned aircraft, satellite imagery, web cameras, downlinks, etc. They suggest the Evaluation of media capabilities to provide intelligence and information gathering

A helicopter coordinator should be provided to work with all military helicopters assigned to an incident. Include military in preseason training and certification sessions.

A coordination process to synchronize activities of multiple incidents or agencies should be implemented.

#### Ground Safety

Tracking systems are needed for personnel assigned to incidents, for both purposes of safety and most efficient use of resources.

A policy or process is needed to develop “bird dogs” or local guides for non-local resources.

Resources should be assigned to tasks that are suited to their skills and experience.

All responders should have adequate PPE.

Consider firefighter safety in community development and fuel plans. Ensure the fire service is adequately represented in planning sessions.

Perimeter control and structure protection needs to be an integrated strategy

Utilize technology, equipment, and products to minimize exposure and maximize efficiency and safety

Support development and continuity of interagency training classes, exercises, and simulations

### Incident Management

Develop adequately trained and qualified personnel for incident assignments. All agencies need familiarization all aspects of ICS as a tool and its flexibility to fit the situation at hand.

County-wide workshops and drills and WUI operations training programs are needed that would include participants from all fire departments, law enforcement agencies, and all other assisting agencies. Groups expressed training should be available at all levels to all agencies, to include command and field exercises, classes, SEMS and ICS. An all-department, all risk Unified Command should be mobilized. Participants feel it is crucial to continue to foster pre season meetings and training and to encourage participation by all public safety agencies. Interrelationships should be a priority, and regular meetings help build on these partnerships.

Preparedness meetings and training should also include the Emergency Operations Center (EOC), Geographic Area Coordination Centers (GACC), and the Emergency Communications Centers (ECC). Time should be taken to further develop and review roles and responsibilities and contacts between GACC, EOC, ECC, etc. Fire agencies need strong involvement with the County EOC during incidents and should designate a representative(s).

Consider the development of a countywide qualification system, similar to CICCIS.

### Interagency Relationships

Groups expressed it was important to further develop coordination between law enforcement, the fire services and the military. Accessibility to military resources needs to be streamlined, and fire agencies need to be educated about the capability and accessibility of military resources, and the processes necessary to train, certify and use them.

Countywide training workshops are needed. Expand participation outside fire to include assisting agencies/departments. Groups expressed it was important to further develop coordination between law enforcement, the fire services and the military. Accessibility to military resources needs to be streamlined, and fire agencies need to be educated about the capability and accessibility of military resources, and the processes necessary to train, certify and use them. Prioritize inter relations and preparedness.

Develop and review roles and responsibilities and contacts between the EOC, GACCS, and the ECC to improve coordination and communications.

Mobilize an all-risk unified command that includes all departments.

Continue to foster preseason meetings and training.